

A Special General Meeting will be held on Saturday, October 11th, at 7:30pm, before the start of the start of Hugh Linn's talk, to discuss and vote on the following proposal:

"This Society should donate £10,000 to the Gwent Wildlife Trust as a contribution to their recent purchase of land adjacent to their Magor Marsh Reserve, on the understanding that it will be managed in such a way as to encourage breeding Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe."

The background to and justification for this proposal are on the insert enclosed with this Dipper.

## **Bert Hamar Memorial Bursary**

As in previous years, the Society would like to award a bursary of up to £100 for an ornithological project in Gwent in memory of Bert Hamar. The grant is available to GOS members only, and a condition of the grant is that a short article on the project would be written for the annual report. Applications, including details of the project, estimated expenses and any other funding should be sent to Trevor Russell by 15th October.

A small sub-committee will consider applications, and the successful applicant will be announced at the AGM in January.

## **Breeding Barn Owl shot in Cwmyncyoy Quarry** **Leyton Williams-Davies**

On the 31st of July, I found a Barn Owl in Cwmyncyoy Quarry that had been shot with an air weapon. I took it to Dave Cooksey at Llangibby but sadly it died 2 days later. I informed the local police but unfortunately their Wildlife Liaison officer is on long-term sick leave, so I also contacted Sergeant Ian Guildford who is currently seconded to CCW.

I'm very used to seeing Tawny Owls but had not seen Barn Owls locally until now. The bird was a female with a brood patch suggesting she had been breeding. I checked the quarry over the following evenings and heard calls. I then saw another Barn Owl, which I assumed to be

the mate, entering a hole in the quarry face, and made the same observation on several evenings. At first, I wasn't sure if he was feeding young or just calling for his mate, but there was a lot of noise from the vicinity of this site. Subsequently, I saw at least one young Barn Owl flying with the surviving parent, and it sounded like there was one other screeching in dense scrub next to the quarry

The quarry is currently in the process of being designated as a Local Nature Reserve but this is taking a long time, and is not likely to be completed until next year. We have a real problem with youths (and some adults) taking air weapons into the quarry. The local "culture" seems to be that anything that flies is fair game. There is such a good diversity of bird life in the quarry, which contains some really good habitats, and it is extremely distressing to those of us who want to protect them. I've remonstrated with some on several occasions (at some risk to myself) and called the police on others but without much effect. I'd like to see signs put up at the entrances threatening prosecution, and for voluntary wardens to patrol. I've volunteered on many occasions but Torfaen Council have not taken up my offer. I know others who are also keen. I was at the Torfaen LBAP launch day last August (2002), and the Barn Owl is a priority species in our local plan. Perhaps GOS could put some pressure on the Council to get them to fulfil some of the commitments they made that day.

Editors note: I was at a recent training session by Sergeant Guildford at the Gwent Levels Reserve. His overall message was to observe carefully, making full notes of your observations (including times, weather, proximity to any "action" etc), and to report the incidents to the police, particularly those involving firearms. He strongly advised against confronting anyone carrying or using firearms, or anyone you think is acting suspiciously. If an individual has already been convicted for wildlife incidents, they are at a risk of imprisonment for subsequent offences, so they may harm you to avoid this. Thorough notes are essential in case you get called to give evidence at any trial. Unfortunately, any incident involving firearms requires the attendance of specially trained officers, so there may well be delay before these officers arrive at the scene.

This incident was discussed at the August Committee Meeting and GOS Chairman, Andrew Baker, has written to the Acting Chief Executive of Torfaen Council asking them to expedite the designation of the quarry as a Local Nature Reserve. Due to the involvement of firearms, he also contacted the Chief Constable. He has had a positive response from Torfaen Council, and the matter has been passed on to their head of wildlife matters for Torfaen. He has not yet had a response from the Chief Constable.

**News from the Gwent Levels Wetlands Reserve**  
**Tony Pickup, Senior Reserve Manager**

The high summer is always a quiet one in bird terms on the reserve, (if you ignore the odd White-rumped Sandpiper which people find!) However the hiatus gives us time to do some of the more intrusive management on the reserve. A large machine was brought in in July to re-create ridge and furrow landform on some of the reserve's flat, ex arable fields. This amazing piece of kit (owned by the RSPB) can excavate a 10-foot wide, 1-foot deep furrow in one pass, and throw the spoil up to 100 feet across the field. In 4 days it re-contoured 20 hectares of fields – at an amazing work rate of over 1000 feet of furrow per hour. The reason for the work is to enable partial flooding of fields. At the moment these flat fields can have no surface water one day then be completely flooded the next. With ridge and furrow the area of flooding can be gradually increased and closely controlled.

Complete flooding has a number of disadvantages including reducing earthworm populations. Only relatively few species can survive prolonged submersion. Many more can hold their breath for a short while, but need to come up for air every 3 weeks or so! Some are almost completely intolerant to total immersion. By having ridge and furrow, floods can be allowed to rise slowly, pushing less tolerant species ahead of the rising waters up onto the tops of the ridges. Good earthworm populations maintain good soil aeration and help reduce the domination of the sward by species such as rush. They also provide essential food for breeding waders. The close relationship between egg volume and earthworm availability is well known as is the relationship between chick survival and egg volume. So if we can provide more food for egg-laying females we can improve the survival of her chicks.

Having ridges that can be kept above the floods may also allow us to maximise the production of good “duck food plants”, possibly by actually sowing them on the ridges in early spring, but that's rather “blue-sky” thinking at the moment.

Going back to chick survival, this year the productivity of Lapwing chicks from the Goldcliff lagoons was exceptional and raised the reserve's total chick production to well over the 0.6 young per female needed to maintain the population's size. A lot of the grassland Lapwings lost small young in the wet May/June and quite a number of birds must have moved to the lagoons to re-lay. The sources of failure were not always obvious, but on one occasion I watched a Crow systematically working through an area of rush patches that initially held 10 young from 3 broods. The broods were lost at 1 week, 2 weeks and 3 weeks old. Only one pair of Crows (non-breeding but territorial) worked this territory. It makes you realise what the total losses could amount to.

To hit your editor's deadline I must finish, so apologies for the sparsity of bird records. However, must mention the fantastic Black-tailed Godwit passage. Our maximum count was

261, but I suspect that one of you has a greater one.

## **BTO News**

**Jerry Lewis**

Current Surveys: It's the time of year when breeding season survey forms are returned (BBS, WBBS, Heronry cards, Woodcock forms). I have received several so far but many are still awaited. Please bear in mind the cost of postage of BBS/WBBS forms. If an A4 envelope is used, a single first class stamp is insufficient. The extra postage cost is only 6p but the "fine" takes the total cost due to £1.06, and I have already had several postage dues to pay this year. If you haven't yet returned your forms please ensure the correct stamps are used. New volunteers are always needed to survey BBS squares and the following are currently available for 2004:

- SO3929 (Ewyas Harold, Hereford)
- ST2385 (Michaelston-y-Fedw)
- SO5119 (Llangrove, Hereford)
- ST4799 (Devauden)
- SO3621 (Nr Pandy)

Others may become available before 2004 so anyone interested in taking on a square (or wants to find out more about the survey) should contact me. I also need volunteers to help with the Winter Gull Roost Survey. Recorders are needed at Llandegfedd Reservoir and on the Estuary at Peterstone Wentlooge. A single count on the weekend of 17/18 January is all that is required, and would be an ideal opportunity for you to brush up on your gull identification in the company of someone more experienced.

Recent Results: It has long been thought that winter sowing of cereals and the loss of winter stubbles has been the major cause of the farmland bird decline. Recent research by over 1000 volunteers (involving over half a million hours trudging fields in winter) has now proved that not all stubbles are the same, with some supporting no birds at all. Although many of the volunteers in the Winter Farmland Bird Survey found very few birds, the results have still revealed new information:

- stubbles are only useful to birds if they contain weed seeds or spilt grain
- barley stubbles are better than wheat
- oil-seed rape and sugar beet stubbles are only good for relatively short periods of the winter

Intensive ringing has also been undertaken in eastern Scotland to look at how 3 farmland birds (Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch and Yellowhammer) cope with finding winter food. Tree Sparrows travel the furthest (up to 3 km between sites) and Chaffinch the least. Tree Sparrows virtually restrict their feeding to stubble fields whereas the other 2 species found food in a wide variety of habitats such as hedgerows, woodlands and gardens. These findings can now be translated into advice on how many weed rich areas are needed, and how they should be distributed, to sustain good farmland bird populations.

Results from the 2002 Breeding Bird Survey have recently been announced, which brings up to date trends during the 1994-2002 period since the BBS started. Many resident species have stabilised or increased after earlier declines - Blackbird, Dunnock, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Song Thrush and Wren, but fewer migrants show upward trends - House Martin, Redstart and Swallow. Continuing long term declines for Willow Tit, Spotted Flycatcher and Turtle Dove (the latter hardly recorded in Wales outside our own county and now infrequently recorded here) are causing concerns. For some species there are regional differences e.g. House Sparrows are declining in most of England and Northern Ireland but increasing in Wales and Scotland. More detailed investigations are underway to try to understand the causes.

The 2002 Peregrine Survey has recorded a new high of 1402 pairs (9% up on the 1992 survey) but there have still been declines in some regions. Peregrines are top predators and were badly affected by pesticides in the 1950's, and their recovery is a major conservation success story. The main expansions have been in southern and central England where the coastal areas have been colonised and birds have expanded into inland counties where they have not previously been recorded.

Other increases have occurred in northern England, southern Scotland and South Wales (despite the increasing persecution). In these areas new quarry sites and tall buildings have been used for nesting. Declines have occurred in north and west Scotland, Shetland (where it no longer breeds), and inland parts of north Wales and Northern Ireland - the declines have been attributed to food shortages, marine pollution and persecution.

Recent research has shown that over winter, Golden Plover and Lapwing behave like teenagers - staying up all night and spending days loafing around. It was known that the birds did some feeding at night, but it is now known that most of their feeding is done in the hours of darkness, with only occasional snacks during daylight. This is because the large worms (their staple diet) are only active and on the surface at night. Flocks seen loafing during daytime

disperse after dark to forage over fields up to 10km away.

## **Breeding Atlas - Final Returns now needed**

### **Al Venables**

With the end of the 2003 breeding season, fieldwork for the Gwent Breeding Atlas has finally come to an end. This was the "mopping up" year in which a relatively limited selection of tetrads was covered by a reduced number of observers. Early signs indicate that most if not all of the outstanding tetrads have been covered.

The great mass of data now needs to be collated and analysed. This will be an enormous task which the organisers would like to start as soon as possible, so please could all observers return their cards as soon as possible to me. Also return any casual records you have made for this year.

Hopefully a number of you will also have done some 2km walk counts that can be used in the estimation of population sizes, and it would be helpful to have these as soon as possible.

Thanks to everyone who has participated over the last five years. Our intention is that everybody's contribution (even if it was only the odd casual record) will be acknowledged in the final publication. However I must admit to some apprehension about making this commitment as we are almost bound to omit somebody by mistake!

I don't know about you, but I will miss the Atlas fieldwork which is one of my favourite bird-watching activities. It has taken me to many parts of the county that I would not otherwise have visited, I have seen many interesting bits of behaviour (e.g. a pair of Curlews mobbing a Buzzard very aggressively) and I have learned many new things (e.g. the song of the Treecreeper). I have also been impressed by the amount of ornithological interest shown by people I have met - numerous records of Tawny Owl and Sparrowhawk have come from conversations with the locals.

What on earth will I do next spring?

## **Recent Bird Sightings**

**Compiled by Chris Hatch and Helen Jones from information received on the G.O.S./Welsh Water Bird Line and on the website**

None-bird sightings that may be of interest	Location	Date
<b>May</b>		
Cwmbran, Thornhill	27	Spotted Flycatcher – this is the only rep
Wentwood	29	Nightjars at Cadira Beeches/Nine Wells
<b>June</b>		
Newport	2	19 Lapwing on River Usk off the Mooring
GLWR Goldcliff	3	
18		
28	1st summer Curlew Sandpiper, also on 16th; 1 Sanderling; ≥3 Avocet chicks	
3	Spoonbill (identified as 3 imm. on 28th, 3 still present 01/07); 4 chicks & 2 ad. Avocets (1 ad. deserted)	
2	Common Sandpiper; 1 Green Sandpiper; 1 1st summer Little Gull	
Peterstone	4	1 Cuckoo
GLWR Uskmouth	9	20 Whimbrel; 1 Cuckoo; 1 Stock Dove
Llangybi	10	Hobby sparring with Buzzard; 2 Common
GLWR	11	1 Squacco Heron
Usk	13	Family group of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
Llandegfedd Res.	12	
28	1 Tree Sparrow; pr on 13th	
1	Redpoll at feeding station	
Trelleck	14	Nightjar & Woodcock
Monmouth	17	Hobby feeding on House Martin – HM h
<b>July</b>		
GLWR Goldcliff		
01		
02		
10		
11		
15		
17		
18		
29		

Avocets – see 18th June; Little Egrets recorded most days, max. 14 on 15th  
 5 Pintail; 1 Marsh Tit  
 1 ad White-rumped Sandpiper; 1 Wood Sandpiper (to the 4th)  
 21 Little-ringed Plover; 1 Greenshank (2 on 15th); 3 Common Sandpiper (3 on 15th & up to 5 on 18th)  
 1 ad. Spoonbill, orange colour-ringed both legs (also on 18th – crest reported clearly visible on 15th)  
 3 Turnstone (2 on 18th);  
 24+ Manx Shearwater offshore  
 3 eclipse Garganey; 2 Snipe; 2 Whimbrel; 1 “smart” Reeve; c 150 Dunlin; 2 Yellow Wagtails; 1 Whin

1 Black Tern; 1 Whimbrel; 3 Turnstone; 32 Black-tailed Godwit  
Newport 01

12 1 ? Yellow Wagtail

≥57 Lapwing; 30 Redshank – The Moorings, St Julians

Ynysfro Res. 02

1 Bar-headed Goose; 1 ? Ruddy Duck;

GLWR Uskmouth 07

3 Water Rail heard (singles heard May/

Bryn/Gobion 08

11 2 Little Egret; 2 Yellow Wagtail;

2 Green Sandpipers (Gobion)

Llandegfedd Res. 09

15 3 Common Sandpipers (16 on 24th)

1 ad. Yellow-legged Gull (also reported by different observer on 24th)

Abertillery 13

1 Goshawk

Peterstone 15

4 Common Sandpiper; 1 juv. Cuckoo

**August**

Abergavenny 04

23 1 Green Sandpiper, Castle Meadows

2 Swift

New Inn 5

Red Kite has been seen over the Fire S

Monmouth 5

3 hobby fledged

Coedkernew 7

20+ Fieldfare feeding on newly cut hayf

GLWR Goldcliff 7

09

10

14

17

18

19 1 Green Sandpiper (5 on 9th, singles 19th/20th); 2 Wheatear (1 on 19th)

5 juv + 1 Greenshank (6 on 14th, 7 on 19th, 5 on 20th); 2 juv. Ruff (3 on 14th, 1 juv on 20th); 5 Snipe

23 Little Egret (recorded in smaller numbers throughout the month)

Juv Marsh Harrier; 3 Knot (7 on 19th); 3 Snipe; 1 Yellow Wagtail (6 on 19th, 7 on 20th)

180 Black-tailed Godwit

7 juv. Little Ringed Plover (3 on 20th)

Juv & adult Hobby;

Pontypool 9

At least 2 Barn Owls fledged at a site ne

Bryn/Gobion 12

20 12 Goosander; 12 Grey Heron; 2 Green Sandpiper; 5 Common Sandpiper

2 Little Egret; 5 Green Sandpiper

Severn Crossing 13

Barn Owl flying in front of second Sever

Llandegfedd Res. 12

15

18

21 1 Goshawk

2 Little Egret; 1 Green Sandpiper; lots of Warblers at feeding station

3 Greenshank; 5 Common/ Arctic Tern



1 Black-tailed Godwit; 1 Ruff; 1 Yellow-legged Gull

Collister Pill	16
Black Rock	16
Caerleon	17
Llantrisant	17
Usk	20

6 Wheatear; 1 Whinchat; 1 Yellow Wag  
Hobby hunting between Black Rock and  
4 Greenshank; 1 Green Sandpiper; 2 C  
Hobby  
3 Greenshank also 4 on 22nd; Common

Monmouth 29/05

12/08

16/08

17/08

Club-tailed Dragon Fly, River Wye north of Monmouth

Clouded Yellow;

Humming bird Hawkmoth, Wyesham also Osbaston on 18th

Silver-washed Fritillary

Llandegfedd Res.	09/07
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Marbled White; Purple Hairstreak

Abergavenny	13/07
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Hummingbird Hawk Moth

GLWR Goldcliff	02/08
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04/08

07/08

14/08

Meadow Browns & Gatekeepers plentiful; several Common Blues

Painted Lady; Small Tortoiseshell; Clouded Yellow; Emerald Damselfly; Emperor; Southern Hawker;

Clouded Yellow, Common Blue; Meadow Brown; Tortoiseshell; Painted Lady, Gatekeeper, Red Adm

Silver Y Moth (good numbers); Painted Ladies

## **BTO Regional Conference, Y Tabernacl, Machynlleth, Saturday 18th October**

All birdwatchers are welcome to this conference which starts at 10:00, finishes at 17:30 and costs £15

10:00 Registration, tea & coffee

10:30 Welcome

10:40 Challenges facing conservation in Wales, Derek Moore

11:10 Pied Flycatchers – how many in our Woods? Dawn Balmer, BTO – followed by coffee

12:10 Seabird ringing in Pembrokeshire, Steve Sutcliffe – followed by lunch

14:00 Using bird observatory data to monitor populations and follow global warming, Dick Loxton

14:30 Why record nests? Dave Leech, BTO – followed by tea

15:30 Following Rusty the Swallow, Bridget Griffin, BTO

16:00 Closing remarks – followed by Open Forum on bird surveying in Wales 16:30 – 17:30

## **Recent Field Trip Reports**

Cotswold Water Park, Sunday 18th May: Perhaps because of the early start from Chepstow, or the threatening forecast, only 4 members set off for this field trip. Indeed, on arrival at the Water Park, we soon faced very heavy rain. Fortunately, several hides allowed us to dodge the showers and the unusual sight of 4 Temminck's Stints together in one of the quarries raised our spirits. Despite the rain, we were able to cover many of the pits maintained for bird watching and to see a good range of species during the day. Although we were never able to obtain good views of them, 2 Nightingales pouring out their song further brightened the day. However, the undoubted highlight was the sight of 6 Hobbies flying backwards and forwards low over the edge of one lake in the rain, feeding on insects and occasionally perching in overhanging trees, allowing us to enjoy very close views. At the end of the day we were surprised to see that we had logged 60 species.

### **Little Mill Monkswood Coed Glas Atlas mop up walk 24th May 2003:**

Only 3 turned up for this walk, which was cut short due to rain. A number of species were recorded at both Little Mill & Monkswood: Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Swift, Swallow, House Martin, Wren, Dunnock, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Spotted Flycatcher, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Bullfinch.

Also at Little Mill: Cormorant, Mallard, Buzzard, Cuckoo, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Grey Wagtail, Robin, Blackbird, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Jay, Magpie, Raven, Starling.

Also at Monkswood: Pied Wagtail, Nuthatch.

### **Pembrokeshire weekend, 7th – 8th June:**

As the Cotswold Water Park proved, the success of any field trip does not always depend on good weather. However, the sunny, warm weather we enjoyed during our stay in Pembrokeshire was a wonderful bonus. On Saturday morning the group met at Martins Haven, as arranged, in time to take the first crossing to Skomer Island. After a brief talk from the warden, we slowly made our way around the island, concentrating our attention on the resident breeding species. While watching the Guillemot, Puffin, Razorbill, Kittiwake and Fulmar colonies at the Wick, we were particularly fortunate to see a spectacular chase by a Peregrine of 2 Pigeons at very close range. For most of us the highlight of the day was the sight of Short-eared Owls quartering the area near the Old Farm where we had rested to have lunch. At the end of the day we all agreed that no matter how many times you have visited Skomer before, it provides an unforgettable experience. In the early evening, after landing, some of us walked around the Deer Park, where we enjoyed superb close views of a pair of Chough but failed to

get good views of Manx Shearwaters returning to Skomer at dusk. Later, during the evening meal in Dale, we decided to meet at Marloes National Trust car park on Sunday morning in order to visit Marloes Mere and to walk part of the coastal path. However, the best laid plans... As we were walking up the track from the Marloes Sands youth hostel to the nearby National Trust car park where we had arranged to meet other GOS members at 9.30 a.m., Karl Richards caught sight of a bird on a barbed wire fence in the adjoining field. He at once recognised it as a European Bee-eater! We then watched it for 5 minutes or so through binoculars and telescopes before joining most of our GOS friends at the car park. From there, we all watched the bird hunting for insects until we had to leave at 10.30 am. Jeff Fisher and Karl Richards took digital pictures when the Bee-eater perched on the fence, and one of Jeff's photos of the Bee-eater has appeared in the August edition of Birdwatching magazine. This sighting provided an unexpected conclusion to a memorable weekend.

### **Uskmouth, 1st June:**

A good number turned up for this walk and saw a good selection of birds. Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Mute Swan, Shelduck, Mallard, Pintail, Tufted Duck, Buzzard, Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Pheasant, Moorhen, Coot, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Cuckoo, Swift, Green Wood Pecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Swallow, Meadow Pipit, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Cetti's Warbler, Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Whitethroat, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Magpie, Rook Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Starling, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Reed Bunting,

### **Goytre, 15th June.**

Total 64 species including: Grey Heron, Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Mallard, Buzzard, Moorhen, Coot, Lapwing, Common Sandpiper, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Feral Pigeon, Swift, Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Swallow, House Martin, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Nuthatch, Tree Creeper, Jay, Magpie, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Raven, Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet.

### **The Bloreng 29th June.**

Thanks to Pete Boddington for leading this in Chris Hatch's absence. A good number turned up for this walk, and were rewarded with a variety of upland birds: Kestrel, Buzzard, 4 Peregrine (2 juvenile), Swift, Green Woodpecker, Swallow, House Martin, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Redstart, Whinchat, Stonechat, Wheatear, Blackbird, Willow Warbler, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Nuthatch, Linnet, Carrion Crow and Raven. The highlight was watching the male Peregrine

dropping a pigeon to the female.

### **Govilon 5th July, Dawn Higgs**

Grey Heron, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Peregrine Falcon, Pheasant, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Stock Dove, Swift, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Swallow, House Martin, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Dipper, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Nuthatch, Jay, Magpie, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, and Bullfinch. We also spotted an unusual parakeet species that we were unable to identify, and to top it all, we had tea and cake at Dawn's parents! Thanks Dawn.

### **Roosting birds at the Uskmouth reedbeds, 26th July: leader Richard Clarke:**

A window of dry calm weather enabled the evening walk to take place and the five people who took part were able to watch good numbers of birds coming to roost. The most prolific were Starlings, some 2,000 having initially pre-roosted on local pylons eventually folded into the reedbeds at 8pm. More modest in their numbers were Sand Martins, c50 and c25 Swallows, but again finding their way into the reeds to roost. Several Cormorants arrived to alight on the pylon overlooking the old pool and by the end of the walk there were 20 birds sitting up including 3 very pale juveniles.

In addition to roosting birds the group also saw plenty of signs of successful breeding with juvenile Great Crested Grebes and Reed Buntings being about. The threat of imminent rain meant that Swifts were hunting very low over the site with as many as 100 being evident. The presence of such numbers heralded the fact that the species would be leaving our shores shortly. In all, 38 species were recorded including Little Egret (3), Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Water Rail (3), Green Woodpecker, House Martin (15), a Cetti's Warbler, Goldfinch (15) and Linnet. Steve Butler had also seen a Hobby on arriving at the site.

### **Llangorse Lake – 2nd August 2003 (Karl Richards):**

Eight keen individuals gathered at 6.30am in perfect bird watching conditions for what has become an annual event in our outdoor calendar. Jerry Lewis accompanied us up to the hide on the first leg of our walk to meet one of his fellow ringers who already had birds ready for ringing. We were treated to fabulous views of the following adult and juvenile birds in hand: Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Garden Warbler, Reed Bunting and Blue Tit. However, a spirited dash towards the nets by Jerry told us something special was in store and it was – a juvenile Water Rail! When we returned to the ringing hut later in the morning, we had the further opportunity to closely study: Willow Warbler, Goldfinch, Treecreeper, Wren, Blackcap and Blackbird. In all, 48 species were recorded.

1. Great Crested Grebe
2. Cormorant
3. Grey Heron
4. Mute Swan
5. Canada Goose
6. Mallard
7. Shoveler
8. Tufted Duck
9. Buzzard
10. Coot
11. Lapwing
12. Black Headed Gull
13. Lesser Black-backed Gull
14. Herring Gull
15. Common Tern
16. Wood Pigeon
17. Collared Dove
18. Swift
19. Sand Martin
20. Swallow
21. House Martin
22. Pied Wagtail
23. Dunnock
24. Robin
25. Song Thrush
26. Spotted Flycatcher
27. Willow Tit
28. Nuthatch
29. Magpie
30. Jackdaw
31. Carrion Crow
32. Raven
33. Starling
34. Chaffinch
35. Greenfinch
36. Linnet

On behalf of all those present, thanks to Jerry and his team for their patience, skill, boundless enthusiasm and encyclopaedic bird knowledge that made our day all the more enjoyable.

**GLWR Goldciff 16th August, leader Chris Jones/John Bennet:**

The event was well attended with 25+ people. With water levels on the first lagoon on the low side, c350 Dunlin and 30+ Ringed Plover gave excellent views in front of the first viewing platform. Other waders present included 5 Little Ringed Plover, 12 Knot, 2 Ruff, 12+ Black-tailed Godwit, 6+ Greenshank, and a Common Sandpiper. Several Teal were scattered around the lagoon and at least 1 Yellow Wagtail was found in the marginal grass in amongst several Pied Wagtails. A flock of 10 Gadwall was seen briefly in flight over the far side of the lagoons.

### **Ogmore Estuary Saturday 6th September (George Noakes).**

This was the first of two walks arranged in order to familiarise GOS members with the Glamorgan "hot spots" Ogmore Estuary and Lavernock Point. For this trip we were fortunate to have the guidance of Paul Roberts, a local birder. A dozen members gathered at Ogmore Castle and after a brief introduction by Paul we headed along the riverbank towards the beach. Common river species such as Common Sandpiper, Kingfisher and Grey Wagtail were soon picked up, but the main focus of our attention was the gull flock, which included a second-winter and an adult Mediterranean Gull. Paul drew our attention to an Egret which showed some characteristics of the Snowy Egret; yellow lores and legs that were yellower than usual. Soon after Steve Butler spotted an unusual pale Pipit feeding on the opposite bank with Meadow Pipits but despite extensive searching, we failed to relocate it. Disturbance by dog walkers and bait diggers flushed most of the birds from the river so few waders were seen. We then crossed the road and explored Ogmore Down. The valley leading to the down produced a good number of warblers and very close views of a Sparrowhawk overhead. We then returned to our starting point, having enjoyed excellent weather conditions for the walk which had taken us through a variety of habitats. Fifty-four species were noted:

1. Cormorant
2. Little Egret
3. Grey Heron
4. Mute Swan
5. Mallard
6. Sparrowhawk
7. Kestrel
8. Buzzard
9. Pheasant
10. Ringed Plover
11. Lapwing
12. Dunlin
13. Redshank
14. Curlew
15. Common Sandpiper
16. Green Sandpiper
17. Mediterranean Gull

18. Black-headed Gull
19. Lesser Black backed Gull
20. Herring Gull
21. Great Black-backed Gull
22. Stock Dove
23. Wood Pigeon
24. Green Woodpecker Swallow
25. House Martin
26. Meadow Pipit
27. Rock Pipit
28. Grey Wagtail
29. Pied Wagtail
30. Robin
31. Stonechat
32. Wheatear
33. Song Thrush
34. Lesser Whitethroat
35. Whitethroat
36. Chiffchaff,
37. Blackcap
38. Willow Warbler
39. Blue Tit
40. Great Tit
41. Magpie
42. Jackdaw
43. Rook
44. Carrion Crow
45. Raven
46. Starling
47. House Sparrow
48. Chaffinch
49. Greenfinch
50. Goldfinch
51. Linnet
52. Bullfinch
53. Yellowhammer

## **Committee Commentary for June & August**

**Trevor Russell**

Sand Martins in Monmouth: In June, we heard that work had started on the second Monnow Bridge. This involves re-profiling the sandstone retaining wall downstream from the old bridge where Sand Martins have nested in artificial drainage holes provided for the purpose. Representations were made to the builders who preserved 4 likely nest sites until after the

fledging period. It is hoped that similar sites will be made available in the new, widened flood retention wall.

Shows: It was agreed that GOS would be represented at both the GLWR Open Day on July 13th and at the Usk Show on Sept. 13th in the hope that this would yield more new members than the Monmouth Show.

Land at Magor: The main topic of both meetings was Alan Williams' proposal that GOS should donate £10,000 to the Gwent Wildlife Trust as a contribution towards their cost of purchasing 33 acres of agricultural land adjacent to the GWT Magor Marsh Reserve. The Committee agreed the proposal in principle, subject to the requirement that the 33 acres should be managed to encourage breeding Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe. It was not considered likely that this would conflict with any ambitions GWT might have to encourage flora diversity. Advice as to how this could be achieved would be sought from Tony Pickup, Senior Reserve Manager at the GLWR, and passed to the GWT for comment. It was acknowledged that expenditure of this magnitude would require approval by the membership and this would be sought at a Special General Meeting prior to the Indoor Meeting on October 11th.

GOS/Welsh Water Bird Information Line: In August we heard from Chris Hatch that there is still so little use of this facility that the service will be withdrawn from September 30th unless there is a significant increase in usage. The marked shift to reporting sightings on the website is making it uneconomical to retain the Bird Line.

Membership: The Treasurer reported that as a result of advertising GOS walks in the local press, we have managed to recruit many new members and membership now exceeds Business Plan!

Goytre House Wood: Colin White, Chairman of Monmouthshire County Council declared the wood officially open on July 6th. Since then, Ian Rabjohns and Ruth Brown have checked the Bat boxes – see Ruth's report on page 15. Unfortunately there have been recent reports of fires, cycling and vandalism near the pond. The Police have been informed.

## **Goytre House Wood Official Opening 6th July 2003**



At the opening ceremony, GOS Chairman Andrew Baker acknowledged the support from Betty Morgan who bequeathed the money to allow the Society to purchase the wood. He also thanked Monmouthshire County Council who had made grants available to enable the wood to be made into a safe sanctuary not only for wildlife but also for the general public.

Vice President, Alan Williams, recalled how, in the early 1960's, Betty Morgan had met Bert Hamar and their friendship flourished supported by their mutual interest in birdwatching. Bert subsequently founded the Monmouthshire Ornithological Society (later to become the Gwent Ornithological Society) and became its first President. Betty succeeded Bert as President in the early 1990's

Colin White, Chairman of Monmouthshire County Council declared the wood officially opened. He confessed that he was not the most expert birdwatcher in the county but was always pleased to see 'his' Buzzards and House Martins flourishing near his home and was delighted to open the wood which, he was sure, would give enormous pleasure to a great number of people.

## **Helping Members**

### **Mark Stevens**

When I am out birdwatching I tend to come across quite a few people who show an interest in what I am doing (of course this could be because I look a bit shifty!) which leads me to believe that there lots of people with an interest in birdlife who are potential members of GOS.

The GOS Committee is currently looking at raising the profile of the Society and at ways of attracting new members and helping them to develop their appreciation of birds. An initial step is to form a network of volunteer helpers/advisers to offer support to existing and new members. It would be great to have a list of people who could be asked to contact new members in their area to offer advice on aspects of birdwatching eg: how to attract birds to garden feeders & nest boxes, helping to identify birds, where to watch birds locally.

If you would like to help, please contact Helen Jones, myself, or any Committee Member who will pass the information on to Helen. Don't worry about being lumbered with tasks you are not happy doing – we're just looking for people to pass on a bit of experience.

Don't forget, next time you're chatting to someone to encourage their birdwatching and to tell them about GOS – Indoor & outdoor programmes, comprehensive library, newsletter, annual report, website, surveys etc.

## **Bat Boxes in Goytre House Wood**

**Ruth Brown**

Erica Collket and I, trainee bat workers, Ian Rabjohns (licenced bat handler), and 2 ladder-wielding volunteers met on Saturday 16th August to check the 23 bat boxes put up last winter. It is an offence to handle or intentionally disturb a wild bat without a licence, so it was necessary for someone licenced by CCW to open up the boxes. As a trainee, I am covered by Ian's licence, and have to comply with CCW regulations concerning vaccinations etc.

The boxes look similar, but are of 3 types, hopefully to appeal to different bat species. Unfortunately one type appears tempting to tits, as 3 boxes in one location had large quantities of moss and badger hair in them. Several boxes housed unidentified moths, 2 others had nascent hornet nests, and just one had an adolescent male Pipistrelle bat, probably *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*. This species echo-locates at a higher frequency than the very similar *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*. These species have recently been "split", a situation familiar to birders!

When the bat boxes had been erected last winter, it had been difficult to assess the light and warmth that they would receive, so Ian advised moving several to new locations. Unlike birds, bats don't like boxes to be tucked away, under heavy canopy, so relatively exposed sites have been chosen with boxes often hanging clear of the branches to which they have been attached. This should allow them to receive a fair amount of sunshine.

We did wonder, as we finished, whether we should check the bird boxes too, in case they were more popular, or had been taken over after the nesting period. However our enthusiasm for balancing ladders in the middle of bramble patches against tree trunks of various dimensions had waned by then!

It often takes a while for new boxes to be located by the bats, and for them to start to use them, so hopefully we will find more evidence of occupation next August when we will check them again.

## **Gwent Wildlife Trusts 40th Anniversary Celebration**

On Thursday September 4th the Gwent Wildlife Trust celebrated its 40th anniversary. Highlights of the day included a tour around Magor Marsh Reserve, the official opening of both the Derek Upton Visitor Centre and the Chris Renshaw hide at Magor Marsh by Prof. David Bellamy OBE, President of the Wildlife Trusts, and a commemorative address after lunch at Solutia UK Ltd by David Bellamy.

The GWT was founded to establish the Magor Marsh Reserve in order to protect its two outstanding features 1) the only surviving reed fen and wet woodland in the Gwent Levels and 2) a prime example of a coastal farming landscape of small fields drained by ditches that date back to Roman times. However the levels are constantly under threat from intensive agriculture and vast building projects. Newport City Council is proposing its Eastern Expansion Area for 4,000 new houses to the west of Magor. The planned M4 Relief Road runs along the northern boundary of the Gwent Levels. The Gateway to Wales is a 500acre scheme for houses, industrial units and a University on the Levels next to Caldicot. In addition, the Severn Barrage and Severnside Airport could dramatically alter the nature and peace of the estuary and the levels. Over the next twenty years the unique character of the Gwent Levels could be entirely lost.

GWT has 4,500 members and runs more than 30 reserves, many open to the public. The Trust works to combine nature conservation with practical management; woodland is coppiced and used for charcoal production whilst farmland is managed to demonstrate that farms can be productive and rich in wildlife. Part of Magor Marsh is farmed and underlines GWT's commitment to protect and enhance wild plants, animals and living habitats, both for the good of the environment and the people of Gwent.

In his address David Bellamy, stressed how the Wildlife Trusts were working in partnership with industry despite the perception that conservation and industry were on opposite sides. Indeed he was pleased to receive on behalf of GWT a second donation of £5,000 from Solutia UK Ltd to help them manage their Magor meadows as lowland wetlands. He went on to thank the Environment Agency, CORUS, the Heritage Lottery fund, CCW and others for their financial help towards the Derek Upton Visitor Centre and the educational facilities there for children young and old. There is a Green Revolution going on thanks to the fact that thousands of people are out there doing something! The Wildlife Trusts are actually beginning to knit the world back to order because they have the expertise.

## **News from Local Shows**

**Caerphilly "GO WILD 2003" at the Council Offices, Pontllanfraith on 21st**

## June (free event)

Richard Clarke and Helen Jones attended this event. We were fortunate to have good weather and our quiz was very popular with the youngsters. Richard had selected 22 bird species in the Caerphilly Biodiversity Action Plan for the quiz, and Jeff Fisher had created a certificate which all participants received, regardless of score! These proved very popular. There is a lot of knowledge around as shown in the scores from the 47 completed forms.

Score	22	21	20
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Number	7	2	2
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GOS member Lee Taswell helped us out, as did Geri Foster Thomas who was in the same tent, manning the Glamorgan Bird Club stall. Geri had several posters and books, and some quiz contenders showed initiative in using resources. It was an enjoyable day, despite being frantic at times. After 2 consecutive years, this is now going to take place in alternate years.

## **Gwent Levels Wetlands Reserve Open Day, at Uskmouth Car Park on 13th July (free event)**

Trevor Russell and Helen Jones were in charge of this event, though we had several helpers – Barbara Willis, Keith Roylance, Mick Bailey and Steve Butler. We were very fortunate to have been provided with a gazebo, as it was an extremely hot day and those without cover were grateful for the garden umbrellas that Trevor and I had taken along. For the quiz, Al Venables had selected 15 bird species present on the reserve, and Jeff Fisher provided us with 4 different

certificates, which again were a success. This time, participants had to get at least 5 out of 15 to qualify for a certificate. The event was well attended, and the quiz was popular, with lots of adults having a go. We had 4 new members join on the day – 2 adults, and 2 youngsters, both called Rhys. So we welcome them to the Society. Quiz scores again reflected a lot of knowledge out there. The confusion species for those with scores of 12 and 13 were the 3 passerines – Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting.

Score	15	13	12
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Number	8	13	2
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In both shows above, it was encouraging to see the enthusiasm and curiosity of the youngsters. At Caerphilly adults needed some coaxing to try the quiz, whereas at the Gwent Levels Reserve, many adults readily had a go. Although there is some element of guesswork and process of elimination in answering the quizzes, there is obviously quite a lot of awareness of birds out there.